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December 1, 1997
(Justice)

The following statement was issued today by Chris Decker, Minister of Justice and Attorney General. It was also read in the House of Assembly:

As I announced on Friday of last week, government has decided to re-examine the arming policy of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC).

As has been the case in the past, this issue of critical importance is receiving significant public interest. Government has decided to give all those interested in this issue a full and fair opportunity to express their views.

I am pleased to announce today government has decided to hold more formal consultations on this issue, and will consult with the opposition to form a Select Committee of the House of Assembly.

It is our hope that this committee, made up of members from both sides of the House of Assembly, will begin consultations on the RNC firearms policy with affected communities early in the new year, namely St. John's, Mount Pearl and the northeast Avalon; Corner Brook; and Labrador West, including Churchill Falls.

I must point out that government has not made any decision on this issue, and will not make a decision until we have heard from the people in those areas policed by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. We believe that the chief and members of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, our professionals in the policing field, should be given an opportunity to demonstrate the need for wearing sidearms as part of their uniform. Similarly, we believe the public should have the opportunity to make their views on this very important issue known to government.

We will encourage the Select Committee of the House of Assembly to begin public consultations early in the new year, and to report back in a timely fashion. In addition, the Department of Justice will continue to consult with the various town councils and community organizations as necessary throughout this re-examination process.

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2:50 p.m.



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